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FOREST Management BULLETIN

Reclaiming Forested Bottomlands in the South through the Conservation Reserve Program

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CRP's Beginnings in the Uplands

Pine planting in the South has risen to record levels in response to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Since the CRP's inception in 1985, farmers and other private forest owners have used the program's CP-3 provision to reforest thousands of acres. Eligible landowners can thus get partial payment for the cost of tree planting and annual payments for reforestation on highly erodible croplands. The erosion criteria required to qualify croplands under CP-3 limits participants to upland sites, where efforts to control erosion favor pine planting.

CRP Extended to Bottom-lands

Recently, a new provision was added to encourage even more forest landowners to take part in the CRP. This provision is aimed at enhancing water quality and improving wildlife habitat by encouraging owners to reforest their wetlands. Called CP-14, the new provision became effective Feb-

ruary 6, 1989, with the eighth CRP signup. The new provision provides for tree planting on fields or areas threatened by scour erosion, caused by out-of-bank flows, or cropped wetland areas, as determined by the Soil Conservation Service.

CP-14 provides for payment to participants for part of the cost of tree planting. Also, annual payments are made to owners who maintain their established stand of trees to meet the CP-14 objectives. The trees must serve to improve water quality and restore and enhance the natural and beneficial functions of wetlands. They must also provide multi-purpose forest and wildlife benefits.

To be eligible for cost-share payments, owners must agree to follow specified practices. Their tree planting efforts would be carried out to preserve and improve environmental quality and wildlife by—

1. Doing either of the following:
 - A. Increase sediment trapping efficiencies.
 - B. Improve surface or ground

water quality and reduce eutrophication—a process in which the oxygen in lakes and streams slowly declines. With too little oxygen, fish and other aquatic life will die.

2. Preventing excessive erosion.
3. Providing food and cover for waterfowl and other wildlife. In addition, the trees must be maintained for the "life of the contract." Specific provisions would be covered in writing in the owner's conservation plan.

Planting and Natural Regeneration Options

CP-14 provides an opportunity to reforest bottomlands with a variety of tree species and reforestation techniques. Bottomland hardwoods, including oaks, ash, pecan, walnut, sycamore and many others can, of course, be planted with bare-root stock. The seedlings should be large—12 to 18 inches tall. The root-collar diameter should be 3/8 inch or larger. A balanced root/top ratio is also important.

Natural regeneration is another option for hardwoods or pine/hardwood mixtures. This method of forestation would be the best choice on forests with a high potential for natural reproduction. Another proven technique is direct seeding. This method is particularly suited for the bottomland

oaks, including cherrybark, nuttall, shumard and water oak.

Some of the better-drained sites are also suitable for planting pine seedlings. The owner could grow pine for a rotation and then allow the sites to naturally revert to hardwoods or pine/hardwood mixtures.

Some of the more innovative reforestation techniques will require development of unique compliance methods to assure the adequacy of regeneration. Restoring forested wetlands, however, adds an interesting and important new dimension to the Conservation Reserve Program.